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ABSTRACT

The issue of professional identity is of special concern to academicians in the humanities, especially those involved in the study of modern languages and literature. There is the problem of self-definition. Even reviewing the past of modern language and literature study affords no simple definition, as English as an academic subject has no clear ancestry and too many relatives. The confusion of ancestry and vagrancy of aims is further complicated by vigorous and rewarding hybridization with disciplines such as psychiatry, philosophy, and history. Singleness of professional purpose is also difficult to find. However, there is one feature that does practically unify today's academic teaching of modern languages and literature, and that is professionalism itself. A profession is a calling requiring long and intensive academic preparation to acquire knowledge that is to be put directly to the service of other human beings in a fiducial bond of trust. However, economic crisis and the technologizing of culture are creating problems in maintaining the high-mindedness that professionalism calls for. (TJ)

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Presidential Address 1978

THE HUMAN NATURE OF PROFESSIONALISM

Walter J. Ong

President, Modern Language Association of America

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I.

Some years ago a man unknown to me then and still unknown to me called to see me at Saint Louis University. I was not in. The note he left said that he would come back, but he never did, so that all I know of him to this day is what the note contained. Besides his name, it provided only one brief identifying item to assure that I knew exactly who he was: it stated that he was a fellow member of the Modern Language Association of America. This evening I can only hope to share his single-minded identification with the MLA as I am privileged to address all of our nearly 30,000 members, including him if he has remembered to pay his dues.

It is not easy to speak to or for some 30,000 members, or would not be but for the sagacity of the MLA itself. For the Association in its wisdom has provided that the presidential address be given at the very end of the President's incumbency, when he or she can do nothing to implement anything the address may recommend. So I can only strut and fret my hour--or, you may trust, rather less--upon the stage and then be heard no more, hoping to have produced something more than what Douglas Bush's improved Shakespeare once described as "a tale/Told by an Eliot, full of Pound and fury,/Signifying nothing."

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Bill Schaefer once told me that no past President of the MLA ever turns up again at the Association's offices. I promised Bill that I would be an exception, only to find myself now sad in knowing that he is the one who will not be there. But not entirely sad, for in our human lives endings mark new beginnings. As with great expectations we welcome our new Executive Director, Joel Conarroe, we also wish Bill the very best, knowing that he has taken with him to his new position as Executive Vice Chancellor of the University of California at Los Angeles the same judicious, hard-working, contagious enthusiasm that marked his work for the MLA.

In his seven years as Executive Director, William D. Schaefer, assisted by a superb staff, implemented some of the most sweeping reorganizations in the Association's history. With the Delegate Assembly, the Divisions, various commissions and committees for women and minority groups, the Modern Language Association has been made more responsive to its total membership perhaps than ever before, even at the time of its cozy beginnings in 1883. A lively Job Information Service has been evolved out of what used to be an office producing casual "Vacancy Lists." PMLA has been reoriented. The old Sections and the often grossly overpopulated Discussion Groups have been replaced by 73 new Divisions, mostly active throughout the year, and a Convention format has been worked out which at last December's Convention allowed a total of 734 different group meetings of all sorts and sizes. The Materials Center has been replaced with an active publications program, producing books as complex

the latest volume in the New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare and as popular as the new MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations. Work with the computer has been expanded and the MLA is now capable of producing in-house, by computerized tape for phototypography, the mammoth MLA International Bibliography, running to some 40,000 titles. This technology has made possible publication of three bibliographies within a two-year span, so that the 1977 volume was available in September 1978. Through use of the same painstakingly planned and economical in-house composition, the Research Data Bank will provide the profession next year with its new Guide to Periodicals and offer on-line retrieval services. The Association of Departments of English (ADE) and the Association of Departments of Foreign Languages (ADFL) have expanded to promote interchange of ideas between department heads concerning organizational and pedagogical as well as scholarly needs in the profession.

Not everything is running to perfection, of course, but the MLA has its head as high above water as any active swimmer can expect. Its morale, I believe, is excellent and the promise of its new Executive Director great. As we look forward to the Association's centenary in 1983, we can hope that the succeeding year of 1984 may not be so bad in every way as George Orwell once promised, with thanksgiving, however, that he overlooked the possibilities of a creatively imagined MLA centenary.

II.

We need a strong MLA to face the difficulties and opportunities ahead. Shrinking student populations, the resulting

unemployment, changes connected with the rise of community colleges--changes not without real opportunities--shifts in scholarly interests, the persistent need for better instruction in the writing of English, the need to encourage interest in foreign languages and literatures--all these and other such problems will surely occupy the Association in the next few years. But under them all and related to them all there lies a larger problem to which I should like to address myself this evening, that of professional identity.

All academic disciplines of course experience identity crises from time to time. Ecological disaster has shaken the confidence of the physical sciences. The social sciences have trouble keeping hold on their protean selves. But the humanities live always with permanently abiding identity crises because the humanities concern themselves unremittingly with central issues in human existence which seem to be related to everything generally and nothing at all specifically. Among the humanities the study of modern languages and literatures stands out as particularly plagued by problems of self-definition.

What is a subject called "modern languages and literatures" all about? What common or uncommon rationale can be assigned to those 734 meetings last December? What are they all trying to get at? Every year news reporters will riffle through the program for the esoterica which leap to the eye off every page--oneirocriticism, technotopia and distopia, language as topography in Céline, Basque studies today, deconstructive criticism, and astrology in Boccacio. Reporters know that the same reader who is overawed by the technicalities of science will probably smile

knowingly (or is it uneasily?) at any technicalities in literary study. The kooks are at it again. That's the reason for my problem with language: they all make it so complicated. Why shouldn't it be easy?

Books about the profession only add to the identity problem. They never solve it. Over forty years ago Stephen Potter in The Muse in Chains (1937) joyously celebrated the imminent demise of English Literature--of Inglit or simply Lit, as he called it--as an academic reality. He seems to have been unaware that his excitement about the state of "Lit" actually presaged "Lit's" new life: his book was one more manifestation of the complex psychic and social and noetic reorganization that was turning on T. S. Eliot, F. R. Leavis, I. A. Richards, Cleanth Brooks, and the New Criticism generally. Thirty-five years later, in more diffident and less yeasty prose, G. B. Harrison's Profession of English again took up the question as to what it is all about, spun the question around informatively, fleshed it out, and set it back down again about where it had been.

Identity problems are commonly solved by inserting oneself into one's own history, by examining where one comes from. Alex Haley's Roots has familiarized the whole world with the human satisfactions of locating ancestors. When we look to the historical past of modern language and literature study, however, we find all too many relatives and no clear, unimpeachable, or even plausible ancestry at all.

The language most represented in the professional commitments of the MLA members is English, which is also the mother tongue

of by far the greater number of members. It appears indisputable that the study of one's mother tongue, of how to use it and of works written in it, would have enjoyed longstanding central academic status and thus a sure possession of its past. The contradictory is true. Until around the time the Modern Language Association of America was founded in 1883, modern languages and literatures were not widely established college or university subjects. They had only fairly recently gained a foothold in secondary and elementary schools. Schools in Chaucer's day taught no English, nor did they in Shakespeare's day--when Sir Philip Sidney solemnly reflected in The Defense of Poesy "grammar it [English] might have, but it needs it not, being so easy in itself." In John Milton's day still and even in Samuel Johnson's day the "best" schools did not commonly teach the English language as such, much less English literature, although one could get a bit of English in dissenters' schools or in the "practical" curricula of the "reading, writing, and 'rithmetic" type fostered by reformers such as Joseph Priestly. By Johnson's day one could also study some English in Scotland, where it was just foreign enough to be academically intriguing.

Even scholars are often only subliminally aware of the strange ancestry of English language studies in the English-speaking world, where the academic study of English was a kind of afterthought. Learned Latin was the immediate and much longer tenured academic antecedent of English and of other modern foreign languages in Western Europe--French, Italian, Spanish, German,

Polish, and the rest. Latin had become Learned Latin when, by around A.D. 650, it had ceased to be a mother tongue to anyone, becoming so totally controlled by writing that of its millions upon millions of users for over 1300 years to this day not a one has been able to speak it who could not also write it. Learned Latin, with a little classical Greek if you are speaking of the best schools from the early 1500's on, sat in the curriculum where today "English" sits in the United States and where other Western vernaculars sit in their respective milieux. Moreover, in other parts of the world beyond the Latin-based West, until very recent times essentially similar conditions existed: Sanskrit, Classical Chinese, Rabbinical Hebrew, Classical Arabic, Byzantine Greek, and other typographically controlled elitist languages of lesser range, all divorced from a living mother tongue, served the academic and para-academic world.

When English was finally introduced into the regular academic curriculum of the English-speaking world, it came up from the lower grades. At the university level, until quite recently modern foreign languages were intrinsically more powerful academically than English. As John Fisher reminded members in his 1974 Presidential Address, the Modern Language Association was not founded by English scholars or teachers. Its first Secretary (the Secretary was the antecedent of today's Executive Director), A. Marshall Elliott of Johns Hopkins, was a Professor of French, and of the next three secretaries, only one was in English, and that of Anglo-Saxon vintage. Not until Carleton Brown's incumbency as secretary, 1920-1934, did the turn-around come and members in

English become the majority. Far from having a long academic ancestry, English was an afterthought in the university curriculum. So were other modern languages generally in their own native habitats.

This confusion in ancestry was compounded by vagrancy of aims. Latin was taught for purely utilitarian reasons at first: unless you knew Latin there was no way to find out or talk about any academic or professional subject: the vernaculars had no established terms to express the material in grammar or rhetoric or logic or physics or medicine or law or theology. In Shakespeare's day, without Latin there was really no way to know medicine. Later, when vernaculars developed to the point where they took over as means of academic expression and Latin was no longer so practical, utilitarian aims were still espoused (for want of anything better, Latin served at least to "toughen the mind"). The interest in literature, Latin or any other, as a basically aesthetic experience which we take for granted came late to academia, mostly a product of Romanticism, and it grew as academic attention to vernaculars grew. And until only two or three generations ago the purely theoretical exploration of language remained para-academic, a matter more of extracurricular boondoggling than of direct curricular instruction.

In other words, in the past the teaching of subjects most closely approximating the modern languages and literatures did not even share some of our principal aims in the teaching of modern languages and literatures, the aesthetic and the theoretical aims: read to experience what is going on in the text and, if

you wish, also explain it.

The other aims of language and literature teaching--some going back to Latin-based instruction, others new--further confuse any quest for professional identity. These aims include the development of writing and reading skills in one's own language, and with these skills the development of the dominantly analytic, linear thought processes that lie at the heart of technological culture and that, as we have lately become aware, depend for their very existence on writing. In addition, modern languages and literatures, English and foreign, provide self-enrichment of many sorts, including more sensitive diachronic and synchronic appropriation of one's own culture and, through foreign languages, of other cultures. The teaching of foreign language itself is multipurpose: besides self-enrichment, foreign languages provide students knowledge and skills useful not only for teaching and for foreign service but also for business, international and even domestic--a fact we need to keep in high relief given the present job market.

III.

Modern languages and literatures have complicated their confusion of ancestry and their vagrancy of aims by vigorous and rewarding hybridization with other disciplines. Countless crosses have been disparately produced by individual scholars. Among such might be instanced the seminar in psychiatry and literature at the Saint Louis University School of Medicine which over the past eleven years Charles K. Hofling, M.D., and I have been directing as part of the professional training both for M.D.'s doing their residency in Psychiatry and for select

Ph.D. students in English. But in addition to such separately managed cross-breedings vast cyclonic centers of mixed disciplines have formed, such as structuralism, which can be alternately or simultaneously linguistic, literary, anthropological, phenomenological, psychoanalytic, and much else. The closed-system trends of the past few centuries have been reversed. Many characteristic large-scale developments such as speech act theory, not to mention phenomenological and Marxist philosophy, programmatically refer literature and all human utterance to the activist human lifeworld, from which earlier criticism had preferred to isolate the literary artefact. As scholarship has matured, language and literature have been seen more and more clearly to be of their very nature comparative, not only synchronically but also diachronically, and along virtually all disciplinary fronts.

Recently the study of literature has been further complicated and enriched by the growing study of the highly sophisticated narrative and other verbal art forms of primary oral cultures, cultures untouched by writing. Attention to purely oral art forms enforces diachronic thinking because such art forms are antecedent to writing and are misconstrued if made out to be variants of literature, as in one way or another they inevitably will be so long as the chimeric and anachronistic concept of so-called "oral literature" persists--which I fear may well be forever. The great awakening to oral performance has itself been the result of fruitful hybridization, for the initial discoveries of Milman Parry, continued through Albert B. Lord and others and in another way by Eric A. Havelock, were achieved by a most creative diachronic juncture of ancient classi-

cal studies and field work in modern Yugoslavia and are being carried forward by still further synchronic studies involving Subsaharan Africa and other living oral traditions. The impact of these studies of primary orality is only beginning to be felt in the wide range of fields they are sure to affect. These include not only language and literature themselves, together with structuralism and grammatology (both of these are still at best only minimally aware of oral noetics), but also anthropology, psychology, biblical studies, and many other fields, which, as James Joyce put it, are too numerous to be enumerated.

IV.

Singleness of professional purpose is hard to find in a range of mixed activities such as these. We have many purposes. But in all the multiplicity of our diverse aims and concerns, there is, I believe, one feature of our work which does practically unify today's academic teaching of modern languages and literatures and which is the raison d'être of the Modern Language Association. That one feature, which in effect came into being in the United States with the MLA, is professionalism itself. So long as modern languages and literatures were not established academic subjects, they were nonprofessional, amateur, somewhat bubbly, kept afloat by personal enthusiasms and not infrequently by the carefully cultivated idiosyncrasies and histrionics of their early aficionados. Professionalism came with academic authentication. Today the professionalism centered on language and literature for which the MLA stands holds together the teaching of modern languages and literatures generally, despite our diversities.

We use the terms profession and professional in various ways. A professional often means someone who, by contrast with an amateur, makes a living or receives financial remuneration for exercising one or another special skill or expertise. In this sense we speak of professional automobile mechanics or gardeners or baseball players. But at its peak usage, in its most concentrated sense, profession and professionalism suggest something more than the use of mere expertise. When we speak of "the professions," we are likely to be thinking of such things as medicine and law, which, with theology, constituted the higher faculties from the beginnings of universities in the European Middle Ages.

Such professions are callings which require long and intensive academic preparation to acquire knowledge that is to be put directly to the service of other human beings in matters touching the others' own persons so closely that the relation between the professional person and the one whom he serves normally is and must be a fiducial or trust relation. The physician's patient or the lawyer's client must put himself as a person in the hands of the physician or lawyer, leaving to the professional decisions intimately touching his own person--decisions regarding the ways in which the patient treats his or her own body or allows it to be treated by therapy, sometimes even risky therapy, which can save the patient from disablement or death, or decisions regarding the way in which the client's own actions can be interpretated to the detriment or credit of a client's person before the law. "You're the doctor" or "You

know best, doctor" or "If you say so, doc" are colloquial expressions that register the fiducial relationship, together with some of its inevitable suppressed anxieties.

Services rendered by members of the professions touch the physical or moral or social integrity of the person being served so intimately that they are beyond price. There is no way really to price saving a person from death by disease or vindicating a person from a false accusation of criminal activity. The equations which are made by law or by insurance companies or sometimes even by the professions themselves between specific professional work and a fixed sum of money are factitious. They may be necessary, for members of the professions have a right to live off the services they render. But you do not sell an appendectomy or an acquittal from a charge of murder or of grand larceny as you sell a motor tune-up. Professional fees are of the nature of honoraria and of themselves work on a sliding scale--which, it must be admitted has been known to become a skidding scale under certain circumstances, for members of the professions as well as those they serve share the human condition, which includes at least the possibility of selfishness and avarice.

I have instanced medicine and law as training for professions in the strict sense. To these must be added, from the beginnings of the universities, the other higher faculty of theology and the lower faculty of arts or "philosophy." These in their own way have always been fiducially professional, too. The services of the theologian were to the Christian community rather than simply to individual persons, it is true, but, since

Christian faith is always an exquisitely personal matter, though it can exist only within a relationship to the community, the individual as well as the Church as a whole were in a fiducial relationship to the theologian in his work of exploring the depths of man's relationship to his creator and redeemer.

The professionalism of the faculty of arts or "philosophy" was more complicated. In a sense the arts or philosophy course purveyed something of a core of wisdom. But it is easy to exaggerate the arts curriculum at early universities as a "liberal education" or "core curriculum." As a whole, it was hardly this. At Paris, for example, in the high Middle Ages, the only higher faculty requiring the entire arts curriculum for admission to its course was medicine. Law and theology were not interested at all in the heavy load of "physics" or natural philosophy carried in the scholastic philosophy course and really not much interested in the course's highly technical formal logic. But the arts or "philosophy" faculty was profoundly involved in teaching as such. Teaching went on in medicine, law, and theology, but in the arts faculty it was highlighted. Arts was especially teacher-conscious, if only because of the youthfulness of its students. At Paris every graduate in arts was obliged to teach for two years at least, nisi rationabili causa excusatur. Needless to say, reasonable excuses abounded, but to be exempted from teaching you were supposed to have one. Early liberal arts education was entirely in the hands of educationists.

Teaching of any sort, even in the most banausic matters, is indeed a profession in the strict sense of the fiducial re-

lationship I have just described. To open another's mind is to solicit trust. The bond between student and teacher that is caught in the term Doktor-Vater, though perhaps uncomfortably overpowering at places in Germany today, catches the reality of the relationship. Research calls for a certain fiduciality, too, in the relationship of the research worker or scholar to his or her hearers or readers. Profiteri, from which comes our word "professor," means to speak out publicly on a subject, as the scholar does in his writing as well as lectures. Speech itself is fiducial. The reason lying is wrong, according to much ethical theory, is that speech calls for trust. If speech becomes generally untrustworthy it cannot work and as a result human society collapses. But if teaching and research are fiducial in all matters because of their involvement with the word, they are the more fiducial the closer their subject matter is to the humanistic core of knowledge, that is, the core of knowledge concerned with human consciousness, its history and its creations. Of the creations of human consciousness, the most crucial are language and what goes with it, such as thought, or what is made of it, such as oral and written verbal creations.

With the gracious duplicity taught by the rhetoricians from antiquity on, for want of time let me pass over here without mention the fact that the professions in something like the strict sense of this term are extending themselves today. Their extension is due to at least two developments. First, the subjects studied at the highest university level have proliferated, so that the intensive preparation once possible in only a limited

number of fields is possible in countless subjects today. Secondly and more importantly, the growth of knowledge has subjected more and more of the natural world to man's conscious control and enabled him to direct more and more of nature to the service of the human person. Thus our present bewilderingly rich knowledge of mankind's interaction with environment in terms of sociology, psychology, political irstitutions, biology, chemistry, and much else has, to take one example, given architects, engineers, and city planners responsibilities regarding the quality of human life that they could never have had before. Their work has to be thought out more and more in terms of service to human persons as persons. Service to persons as persons, as I trust I have made clear earlier, seems to define the idea of a profession in its deepest sense. Thus because of their new highly conscious involvement with the quality of human life, which impinges directly upon the human person, architecture, engineering, and city planning have become professions in the strict sense of the term today as never before. And so with other fields of applied knowledge, as more and more areas of expertise jockey for professional status comparable to that of the classic professions. The present status struggle will doubtless enlarge in some way the concept of "the professions," though I think it will never destroy the special place of the classic professions, including that of teacher and scholar-teacher.

Be that as it may, what is important to us as teachers and scholar-teachers, actual or potential, is the fiducial service to persons which our profession entails. Understood

as fiducial service, professionalism bridges some of our most threatening chasms, that between the teaching of writing and the teaching of literature, or that between formalism and activism. As a fiducial service, the teaching of writing yields not at all to the teaching of literature. Indeed, because it is more fundamental, the teaching of writing is more crucial to students and by the same token should be more satisfying to the teacher, even though it is more difficult to sustain day-to-day enthusiasm for what Walker Gibson calls backtracking through student prose than for flying up into The Snows of Kilimanjaro.

By the threatening chasm between formalism and activism I mean that between those who tend to regard language and literature as matters valuable for their own sake, best studied by deliberate exclusion of all political or social or religious or other commitments, and those who regard all human activity as a continuum in which separation of politics or social or religious or other commitments from even the most fictionalized creation or the most abstract thought is unreal, so that it is only pretense to interpret even the most aesthetically distanced creations as not deriving from practical concerns and affecting real-life behavior of readers. My own position here is complex, I suppose, for, while in the last analysis I would subscribe to the activist view, I believe that it is salutary to use formalist approaches. You cannot have praxis without theoria nor theoria without praxis, though one is not the other, for they relate to one another in an infinite number of dialectical ways

and not in accord with foregone ideological recipes. But the view of professionalism which I have been propounding here would apply whether one opts for one or the other view, formalist or activist, or both. If literature is to be conceived of as art for art's sake, scholarly work and the teaching concerned with it are still fiducial services. If literature is continuous with active life, such work and teaching is at least equally a fiducial service.

The concept of professionalism as fiducial service which I have suggested here is certainly helpful to me in relating my own dedication as a Jesuit priest to my academic profession. The Christian ministry is not simply a profession: it is a personal dedication based immediately not on learning but on faith. In the Bible and in the Church's tradition the analogue for the ministry, as for any act of faith, is not the professions but marriage. Matrimonial dedication does not involve intensive academic training such as the professions call for, but it does involve a fiducial relationship at a kind of ultimate depth. It is not difficult for me, nor has it been for many thousands of others, to relate the fiduciality of the Christian ministry, which word means service, diakonia, to the fiducial relationship of scholarship and teaching. The Catholic faith has no right to supplant or interfere with other fiducial relationships, but, if it is truly Catholic, it is not a stranger to them. Trust respects trust.

V.

Economic crises always create problems in sustaining the

high-mindedness that professionalism calls for. This is one reason why professionalism needs to be reflected on particularly today. I wish there were an easy answer that would resolve the economic problems once and for all. There is no easy answer. What answers there are have to be devised painstakingly and agonizingly in a variety of situations as questions of unionization, and reactions to procedures such as internal auditing, margin analysis, and the rest fight their way through our consciousness and our conscience (Gallic lack of precision would be handy here).

Economic crises awaken concerns about the commercialization of the profession. Course design can become the academic equivalent of ambulance chasing. With a shrinking student population, as departments compete to attract the best minds among the upcoming young men and women, how far can we go in making course offerings relevant to what students already know and find themselves at the moment interested in? Can a field of study be shaped by what is close to students' interests or imagined interests before they enter it? Of course, to some extent every field of study is shaped by the choices of those in it. The present shape of knowledge has been determined by the interests of earlier scholars: what they did not find interesting in one way or another was simply not studied. But many of their interests were developed in response to demands arising within the field itself. If you wanted to understand Chaucer, you had to develop an interest in Middle English. The danger comes when the shape of knowledge is being determined largely by forces external to

the field. A field of knowledge has certain structures of its own, demands certain supports in the mind of the knower. How far can we say that someone understands anything in English or American literature if he or she has no acquaintance with anything written in the English language before 1865? And has had no linguistics? And no foreign language, so that the only options for expression, the only register of experience that he or she can ever think of, are those provided by a narrow band of recent English?

For understanding, we need two things: proximity and distance. It is quite impossible to understand the present without knowledge of the past. When we make a statement about the present as present, we inevitably imply one about the past. "Present-day literature is filled with violence," whatever it may really mean, normally implies that this literature is notably violent, which suggests that it recounts more violence than earlier literature did. Do those who make generalizations such as this know how much violence figured in earlier literature as a whole, not to mention oral genres antecedent to literature? They seldom if ever do. Their concept of the past often does not derive from the real past at all but is a projection of their own emotional needs, made plausible by the assumption that the repertoire of selections they remember from their own childhood [redacted] was representative of all the literature then extant.

The only way to find out about the real past is study based on research. This ultimately means that someone has to know such unmentionables as Old English, Old Norse, Old Irish,

Old Russian, not to say ancient Greek, Latin, Sanskrit, classical Arabic, Niger-Congo, Afro-Asiatic, and Native American linguistics, and other linguistics--some of the "hard-nosed" humanities. Without the help of such demanding and detailed knowledge, we are slaves to our own projections. Contact, direct or indirect, with such knowledge cannot redeem us, to be sure, but it can liberate us from enslavement to our ignorant imaginings. "The truth will make you free."

¶ "Nescire autem quid ante quam natus sis occiderit, id est semper esse puerum," Cicero writes in his Orator (120): "Not to know what has happened before you were born is to remain forever a child." ¶ But diachronicity reaches in both directions. Understanding of the past demands a reflective understanding of the present, which generates our own distinctive questions about the past. Much early literary history and other history is relatively worthless because the historians who knew a great deal about the past knew very little in depth about their own age: they had not studied the context out of which they approached the past. Literary history, like all history, can be understood only from both ends: the distant past and the immediate present. Diachronic integrity must always be honored.

These and other questions regarding the total integrity of a field of knowledge and the kinds of demands this integrity makes on professional scholarship and teaching and on curriculum design are serious questions, questions again with no easy answers. But they are questions that can be answered at least in part and that must be answered so far as possible, questions that

professionalism cannot allow members of the profession to sweep under the rug.

VI.

Many would have it that the technologizing of culture also poses problems for professionalism. Technology implies machines. Machines are inhuman. Professionalism is human. And never the twain shall meet.

Most such thinking is based on a specious paradigm: a machine is taken to be an imitation organism--an animal that didn't quite make it. It thereupon triggers fear and resentment, for the machine obviously lacks the qualities which an organism should have: life, adaptability, moods and responsiveness to moods (which even many infrahuman animals clearly exhibit), adaptability to unpredicted change, and so on. If, however, we cease and desist from representing machines to ourselves as deficient organisms and regard them as what they are, inanimate contrivances devised by human consciousness and extending consciousness into the external world, the operation of machines turns out to be no more inhuman than other inorganic phenomena, than tides or gales or frost or heat or desert climates or thousands of other things. Indeed, in a very real sense, as products of man's activity, technological creations are more human than are all the works of nature, except for man himself.

The profession of languages and literatures is totally involved with technology, and intrinsically so. We need to face this fact explicitly and honestly. Literature is a technological creation, for not only print but writing as well is a technology,

dependent for its effective development on the manufacture of prepared writing surfaces, inks or paints, styli or brushes or pens or pencils, and many other materials besides. Print is even more obviously a technology. The first assembly line, the first step-by-step operation producing complicated objects that are exact replicas of each other, with replaceable parts, was not a shoe-producing or a knife-producing operation, but the printing press. High technology developed to this initial peak not in servicing the body but in servicing the mind, human consciousness. This fact should be a heartening and a thought-provoking one.

Consciousness interiorizes technology, opens itself to new possibilities with its own technological creations such as writing and print and electronics, which enable it to think and feel in ways it had not been able to command before. Like the history of instrumental music, the history of literary genres is tied to technological development. Before writing, as we now know, oral performance can be a very sophisiicated matter, but it cannot produce a Greek drama or many kinds of lyric poetry such as Pindaric odes or sonnet sequences, and before print and the kind of writer-reader relationship print establishes, for reasons still not entirely surfaced, the mind cannot organize an ordinary nineteenth-century novel or a detective story, not to mention an Absalom! Absalom! Oral performance cannot produce fully "round" characters, but only more or less type characters. The technology of writing and print enter into the human sensibility and enable it--indeed, force it--to reorganize

its noetic processes and its feel for man's place in the cosmos. Oral performance can produce epics, which are normally its most impressive creations and which, in the strict sense, highly interiorized literacy cannot produce. But most of the genres we know and teach are the products of writing and print technologies, now intermixed with electronics as in the "talked book," worked up from taped interviews.

On the language front, reflectively understood, grammar itself is a product of the technology of writing: its very name, from the ancient Greek techne grammatike, the "letter art," means the study of letters. Oral noetic processes have no access to the intricate kind of abstract analysis and categorization which constitute grammar, or, for that matter, any scientifically abstract thought.

Because the very constitution of our thought depends on writing and print technologies, not to mention electronics, the development of our professionalism itself is dependent on technology, as is the whole of the intellectual and educational enterprise of mankind today, in the world of high technology and in the rest of the world, which has no way to isolate itself from high technology even if it wanted to. We traffic constantly in concepts by the thousands which could not even be formed without a feel for massive accumulation of detailed knowledge which was impossible before print: terms such as "culture" or "civilization," not to mention "polyunsaturated" or "orthogenesis." The New English Dictionary records under its entry for "civilization" Boswell's report of March 23, 1772, that Dr. Johnson

had decided "civilization" was too much of a neologism for his first Dictionary. "Civility" he allowed. Had he known about and espoused orthogenesis, he might have been aware that he was fighting a losing battle.

Let us not be misled by the fact that the study of technologies does drain away students from modern languages and literatures today. This is not because technologies are inhuman. It is because they are eminently human, the creations of human beings. Our "matter" is more human than that of technological studies, however, for it consists of the creations of human beings having to do directly not with the external world but with consciousness itself. Of this "matter," of languages and literatures themselves, we should be proud and enthusiastic. We are at the center of the human lifeworld, in certain ways more than any other profession, as teachers and scholar-teachers of language and literature. Language and literature study can assimilate everything in the human lifeworld, including technology, of which there is a great deal not only in Henry Adams and Saint-Exupéry, but also in Sterne's Uncle Toby, in Cervantes, in Goethe, and indeed almost everywhere you look sharply. Philosophy believes it can assimilate everything in the human lifeworld but ordinarily finds that either its reach exceeds its grasp or its grasp its reach. History tries nobly, but is overwhelmed with detail. The social sciences are generously ambitious but find themselves beset by distractions, though anthropology comes close enough to language and literature studies to make it possible, I myself believe, to view these studies

as in some way a kind of anthropology, a study of man as man. Compared to any of these studies, the study of language and literature may be diffuse in ancestry and ambition, but it is mightily inclusive. Literary studies even aggregate to themselves the oral cultures antecedent to literature, for such cultures have been discovered as oral cultures only by advanced literates.

In the professional study of literature and language, we serve other human beings in encouraging and assisting them to open themselves to the great forces at the center of human consciousness, social, psychological, philosophical, aesthetic, moral, and religious. If in the crises which at present beset us we can remember not only that we are a profession rendering fiducial service to fellow human beings, as all professions do, but also that the service we render brings fellow human beings into relationship with what is most human in mankind, consciousness itself in its most richly creative forms, we can weather any of the crises and threats that come our way and, as Faulkner put it, we can not only endure but we can, and will, also prevail.